



My name is Judson Bemis I am Co-chair of Smart Approaches to Marijuana Minnesota, I am also the founder of an online drug and alcohol intervention program for teens and their families (of which 90% of the families contact us because their teen is using cannabis) and I am a person in long term recovery from a cannabis use disorder. So, I feel I have a fairly unique position to address the issues related to commercialization of cannabis. There are three things I would like to say in my testimony.

First, please follow the science. There are now 20,000 peer reviewed articles on the effects of cannabis use. While it has been difficult to research this in the US, other countries have researched this and published studies. What makes this confusing is that the term Marijuana covers both CBD and cannabis. And while you will undoubtedly hear that “marijuana” has anecdotally helped many people's health conditions, I would like to remind you that the FDA has only approved a few medical uses for marijuana (Epidiolex a CBD based application for early childhood epilepsy and Marinol - synthetic THC - for nausea). Much of the testimony you will hear maybe related to CBD not cannabis. Making Minnesota's current medical cannabis program more affordable would go a long way to solving many of these people's problems but that does not necessarily mean we have to legalize cannabis.

Second, while the jury may still be out on whether commercialization increases adolescent usage, and I believe it does, I can attest from the work that I do that it has a negative effect on adolescent's brains. This is one of the reasons why we are strongly urging the increase of availability to age 25. Yes, tobacco and alcohol may also affect teen brains, but current neuroscience and brain scans are showing that cannabis structurally changes adolescent brain development. Results of long-term studies show smaller hippocampus volumes and impairment in learning, memory, and judgement.

Last, I urge you to consider how to protect adolescents by creating some safety net around those who are caught that are underage. Because of our program we daily get stories of All Star athletes and honor roll students who are now vaping marijuana, won't come out of their room, and are flunking out of school. We need to be able to provide something that may not necessarily be in the juvenile justice system but helps to direct these adolescents to get an assessment from a licensed drug and alcohol counselor and/or into treatment. If prevention programs were successful, we wouldn't need more than D.A.R.E.

Cannabis is not a benign substance. The astronomical increase in potency has changed the equation and there are lessons to be learned from other states. We urge you to slow down, look at the science, see what has happened in other states, before rushing into legalizing an addictive substance that will negatively affect the safety of the citizen of Minnesota.